No. 386.

THE WAY TO USE THE BIBLE;

OR,

HIDDEN TREASURE.

Dialogue I.—The Treasure described.

Thomas.—Well, neighbour—what! at your Bible again! I will venture to say no miser pores over his treasure more than you do over that book.

Joseph. And I will venture to say no miser ever had such a treasure as I have here.

Thomas. If that is true, Joe, I would begin to look into it too; for I am sure times are hard enough; and it would be a fine thing indeed to have a treasure to go to, when wages are low, and the shelves empty; but I must confess when I look into my Bible, I find none of these treasures.

Joseph. I can easily believe that, Tom; for, if you did, I will venture to say, you would look into it a little oftener than you do. If somebody were to put a five-pound note between every page of your Bible, there would not be so

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many leaves there which have seldom or never been opened.

Thomas. True enough, neighbour: but whatever you make of your Bible, I must say I find nothing all through mine that is worth a five-pound note to me; no, nor half that: and yet, I think, I make as much of it as most of my neighbours do. I very often look at the Bible on Sundays; and if I am ill, or laid by from work, I take it up a bit then: but I have not been any the richer for it yet.

Joseph. What should you think of yourself, Tom, if, when you had eaten your Sunday's dinner, you felt no inclination to eat again all the week after?

Thomas. Think! why, I should think myself in a poor way to be sure; and I should feel pretty certain that my Sunday's dinner had not agreed with me, if I had no stomach for anything after. I have known what it is to be ill, Joe, and to have no wish even for the best food; but I could never feel satisfied that I was getting better till I had something of an appetite; and I should think my disorder dangerous indeed, if I could not take anything for a whole week. But how came you to talk about dinner and eating, when we were speaking about the Bible? That is not like you.

Joseph. Perhaps, Tom, you will find it more like me than you expected, when you see what I am driving at. I suppose you will agree that you have a soul, as well as a body; and that the soul, being a spirit, can only feed upon spiritual things. The Holy Scriptures, and the precious Saviour of whom they speak, are the support, the food, the spiritual bread on which a living soul feeds. Now, then, you will understand why I asked you if a dinner once a week would satisfy you. A soul, in a healthy state, requires daily bread as much as a body does; and what shall we think then of the health of that soul, which can go a whole week without any desire to feed on the bread of life?

Thomas. Well, if you come to that, neighbour, I

must tell you that I should not feel very starving if I did not read my Bible on Sunday neither. You know I am obilged to go some distance on a Sunday, sometimes, to see my friends; and then it's a chance if I read my Bible at all; but I can't say I have felt much the worse for it on Monday. Now, neighbour, what will you say to this? Perhaps you will think me a clever fellow to go a fortnight without food, or bread as you call it.

Joseph. Nay, Tom, this is no jesting matter. If you had been very sick for a fortnight, and could not take any thing, except as you were forced, you would think it no joke; and when the doctor came to see you, you would not be for laughing, and calling yourself a clever fellow to do without food, but you would eagerly ask what he took your complaint to be, and whether there was any likelihood of your getting better.

Thomas. Very true, Joe; I might well want to get better in such a case; for 'tis likely I should be suffering a good deal of pain and sickness, if I were in the state you speak of: but whatever you may think about me, I can assure you, I feel nothing of all this in my soul; and I may say I have gone on well for years now, without feeling any of this hungering for the Bible, that you talk of.

Joseph. The more's the pity, Tom: I should be sorry to judge you: but if I may speak my mind, I should say it looks too much as if you had no life at all in your soul.

Thomas. What next, neighbour! So you make me out a dead man now, do you?

Joseph. It is not I who make you out so, Tom: it is that Physician who never mistakes; who searches the reins, and tries the heart, and knows what is in man. Our first father, Adam, died the death of the soul, when he disobeyed God in Eden, and ate of the forbidden fruit; and since that time all the children of Adam have been born dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. ii. 1; and so long as they continue in this state we need not be surprised at

their want of appetite for spiritual things; for you know Tom, a dead man has no appetite at all; and it would be vain to set before him the best food.

Thomas. Well, you won't very easily prove to me that I am dead, while I am as hearty and merry as most men.

Joseph. Be serious for a few minutes, Tom, and I will endeavour to prove this solemn truth to you. Remember, I now speak of the dead state of the soul, as it concerns spiritual and heavenly things. What should you think of a person, Tom, who was in the midst of plenty, and yet never moved to touch a bit? What should you think of a pennyless creature, who had thousands of gold and silver strewed around him, with full invitation to take as much as he would, if you found that he made no use of the invitation? And what should you think of a man, who was in a house that was on fire, with a door set open by which he might well escape, and while neighbours and friends called him to come out, he would never move an inch?

Thomas. Why, I should not think he had much health or strength, or, indeed, much life in him.

Joseph. And do you see nothing of your case here, Tom? What will your neglected Bible say for the goodness of your appetite? Nay, will not your own confession, that you never hunger after it, prove that your precious soul is really in a dead state, and that the Bible is nothing to you, because you have no power to feed upon the precious truth which is revealed in it? It is not, Tom, that the food is not good, for it is the same Bible on which thousands, who are made alive, are daily feasting; but the misery is, that your soul is not able to feed upon it. Again, you tell me that you find no treasure in the Bible; yet was of this book, so far as it was at that time written, king David said, that it was more to him than thousands of gold and silver. Here is hid that wonderful mine, which has made millions rich for eternity. Now Tom, if you are poor, if this mine is set open to you, and you are invited to take what

you will out of it, do you think there is much life in you when you care not to dig at all in it? Once more, Tom; every sin deserves the wrath of God, and I need not go far back to remind you that you have been guilty of one, ay, and of ten thousand. A neglected Bible is witness enough against you, if you had never used a bad word, or felt angry, or broken a sabbath, in all your life. Now then, Tom, it is clear that you are in danger of everlasting burnings; and the Bible points to an open door, and calls on you to escape: if you then pay no heed to the call, and remain in this state unmoved, do you think you show much sign of life?

Thomas. If I really believed that I was in this state, Joe, I should not be quite so easy as I am, you may depend upon it: but I should like to know where you picked up these notions: according to what you say, I am sure the biggest part of the world lies dead and blind, and stupid.

Joseph. My dear Tom, these are not my notions, or I would not press them upon you: they are the sayings of Him who is the faithful and true Witness, even of that God who cannot lie: and if you were a little better acquainted with the contents of this book, you would find it so.

Thomas. There you go to your book again, Joe. You seem to find an answer for everything out of that; and it is but a little while ago that you knew no more of it, no nor so much, as I do.

Joseph. Ay, Tom, that is but too true: and had I been cut off then, I know well enough where I should have been now. I can read that pretty plainly here, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God," Psalm ix. 17. Now, though I have been a tolerably steady character, and not what the world would call wicked, yet I am sure I was, till very lately, among those that forget God; and you see, Tom, where their portion is to be, if they die in that state.

Thomas. Those words would bear hard upon many who seem to live decent lives in other respects; but how can you prove that you were forgetting God at that time, Joe? You used to go to a place of worship, and read the Bible at leisure times, as others do.

Joseph. Yes, Tom, I went to church or chapel when it suited me, often because I had no other way of passing the time; but a slight engagement, or a trifling occupation could make me neglect this: and I read my Bible as I would any other book, when I had nothing else to do; but this was not from any lively remembrance of my God. My wife and children would not be very well pleased with me if I never cared to serve them, but when I had nothing else to do; if I never spoke to them but when I had no other person to speak to; and never listened to a word they had to say for a week together, while I could listen fast enough to what others said: would not this be something like forgetting them, Tom?

Thomas. I should say it would be something worse than forgetting, Joe. I don't think I should be far wrong when I called it very bad usage of them.

Joseph. Well, Tom, I must confess with shame that this is the way I served my best Friend for many weeks, yes, and for many years. I could find time to talk to my neighbours, and to say a great deal that had better have been unsaid, and hear a great deal that had better have been unheard, when I could find no time to speak to God in prayer, or to hear what he had to say to me in his word: and if this is not forgetting him, and slighting him, I don't know what is.

Thomas. Well, Joe, I'll think of what you have been saying, and soon call again, and have a little more talk with you.

Dialogue II.—The best Teacher.

Thomas. How d'ye do, Joe. I've been thinking of what you said to me, and have been looking at the Bible, but I must own great part of it is as bad as Latin to me. It is very well for rich and learned people, who have nothing else to do, to study over it; but I don't profess to be anything of a scholar, any farther than being able to read a chapter.

Joseph. If you had to guide a person to some distant town, Tom, which do you think would be easiest led; a child, who did not pretend to know anything of the way, and who was glad to be taken by the hand, and guided by one who knew it; or a grown-up person, who was proud, and fond of his own opinion, and who was settling the way in his own mind, and ready to dispute with you at every turn?

Thomas. I don't suppose I should be very long making a choice: give me the child, to be sure. I should get him on twice as fast, and twice as easy, as I could the other.

Joseph. So say I, Tom: and He who has graciously undertaken to guide poor sinners in the way to heaven, bids us become as little children, if we would get there; ay, and to become fools in our own opinion, if we would be wise. So you see Tom, we are never in a better state to be guided right, than when we give up all trust in ourselves; and, feeling our own ignorance and blindness, are glad to be led by this heavenly Guide every step of the way. Then, when he tells us such solemn truths as these "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," Jer. xvii. 9; when we hear Jesus declare, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me," John xiv. 6; and moreover, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" it will be enough for us to find it said, "The Lord hath spoken it." We shall not dare to dispute his

word, or fancy that we can get to heaven any other way. Now these, and such as these, are hard sayings to our proud hearts, Tom; and though you complain of your ignorance, I am mistaken if you will not be inclined to set up your opinion against that of God here; and will find it no easy matter to become as a little child.

Thomas. Why, I must acknowledge, Joe, I should be glad to get to heaven without all this. There are not many, I take it, who understand these words just as you do. How do you know that you are right, Joe?

Joseph. I don't pretend to say that I may not mistake some things; but I have One who explains the word to me, and who has faithfully promised to give me the right meaning of all that is necessary for me to understand: and I dare trust him; for he has been a Teacher of thousands, who are now safe at home in glory.

Thomas. And pray, Joe, who is this teacher of yours? I begin to fancy that I should take more pleasure in my Bible, if I could get him to come and tell me the meaning of things, as he does you.

Joseph. I am glad to hear you say this, neighbour, because I will undertake to promise for my Teacher that he will be with any one who wishes for him, and will be ready to teach him by night or by day.

Thomas. But first let me hear, Joe, what you have to pay him for all this: you are a poor man like myself; and I can't well make out how you can manage to spare this money.

Joseph. You will be pleased to hear, that I never paid him a penny for it: his terms are, "WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE," Isa. lv. 1.

Thomas. Indeed, Joe! Well, you have a rare teacher; and I have half a mind to begin with him this very day; but I am afraid he would find me a dull scholar. Is he hard upon one, Joe, or pretty patient?

Joseph. As patient as a lamb: I am sure I'm bound to speak his praises, for though I have often been careless, dull, and unthankful, I never heard an impatient word from him. "Line upon line, and precept upon precept," never tired of teaching me the same thing over and over, explaining "here a little and there a little," just as I am able to bear it; helping me to understand one part by comparing it with another: I can indeed say of him, "he upbraideth not," James i. 5, though he has had a trying scholar in me.

Thomas. Joe, I take it into my head that this is no man that you are speaking of; for I question if we could find such a character as this, look all the world through. It strikes me, you are speaking of some heavenly Friend, Joe, and that's above me.

Joseph. Nay, Tom, why should it be above you, if it is not above me? You are the very man He will delight to teach, if you begin to feel your ignorance, and your unworthiness, Isaiah lvii. 15. If I am not mistaken this gracious Teacher is to be found as often in a lowly cottage as any where. A thatched roof, and mud walls, will not keep Him away from any one who is poor in spirit; nay, he has been found in prisons, and in dungeons, teaching and comforting some, who have been confined to a bed of straw; and even accompanying others who have not known where to lay their heads. He stands ready to come at the first call; and never did any one seek him in earnest, even from the lowest pit of sin and misery, but he found him to be a very present help.

Thomas. Well, Joe, all this is very encouraging, to be sure. I must turn these things over in my mind, and you shall soon see me again.

Dialogue III.—Instruction obtained

Thomas. Joe, I've been thinking of what you said, and I feel that I am so ignorant and dull that I shall never be able to get on, and the Teacher you spoke of will have nothing to do with such a dunce as I am.

Joseph. I am thankful to hear you speak thus of yourself, Tom. I think the heavenly Friend and Teacher I spoke to you about has already taught you your first lesson, if you truly feel your ignorance: it was the first thing I had to learn, that I was by nature as ignorant of spiritual things as the beasts that perish; and when he had taught me this, oh, how I cried to him to teach me more, and to open my poor eyes!

Thomas. I long to ask this good Friend to come and teach me, but I am afraid I have ever-tired his patience and mercy, by turning my back upon him so long.

Joseph. But, Tom, you forget again that he is God and not man; "his mercy endureth for ever:" and he has assured us in his word, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given him."

Thomas. O neighbour, what a poor sinner I am, to have used such a Friend so badly! I think I shall long for the evenings to come now, that I may sit and read his word, and hear what he has to teach me.

Joseph. Remember, however, Tom, that willing as the Lord is to teach, he has said, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them," Ezek. xxxvi. 37. When you take up your Bible, let him hear you cry for your heavenly Teacher from your very heart; and while you are calling, he will answer. It is not the words he looks to; his eye is upon the heart; and if you could not utter one word, he would see whether you were truly desiring his teaching. And you want it every time you open that blessed book.

Thomas. Why, Joe, I reckon you have a pretty good understanding in it now.

Joseph. I wish to feel very thankful for what the Holy Spirit has already taught me, Tom; but one thing he has told me over and over, that if I think I know anything, I know nothing yet as I ought to know. King David had read the Scriptures much, and had even been taught of God to write some parts of them himself; but his cry still was, when he went to his Bible, "Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," Psalm cxix. 18. You know it would be of but little use to set a book before any one who had his eyes closed; and if he really wanted to read, the first thing he would do would be to try to get his eyes open. Now, sin and Satan have closed and blinded the eyes of our souls: and it is only as the Holy Spirit anoints them with eye-salve that we can see, Rev. iii. 18. Then, Tom, if you can say nothing more when you open your Bible, say, as David did, "Lord, open thou mine eyes," and open my heart.

Thomas. That's a short prayer, to be sure, Joe; but it seems a very good one: and I may hope in a short time to be as good a scholar as you are, Joe.

Joseph. And I should not be surprised, Tom, if you were to get before me, and if the last should be first. But, as we compared the Scriptures to food, I would just remind you, that what we eat does us no good unless we digest it. It is not the reading a chapter, or a verse, that will do you good, if you don't give it a thought afterwards. You should pray for grace inwardly to digest the word; to meditate upon it, when you are at work, or walking by the way, or lying down, or rising up; so "when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee," Prov. vi. 22. And as you speak of what is uppermost in your heart, I shall expect to hear you as eager to talk of the Scriptures, as you have been to talk over matters which could not be

mended by talking, and which were often made much worse by it. You will be as much afraid of losing the good seed out of your heart, as the farmer is of losing the seed out of his field; and you will set watchfulness and prayer, to keep off Satan and his servants from robbing you of it. It will be treasured up in your heart, and will speak loudly to you when you would sin against your God.

Thomas. Why, Joe, if all that you say comes to pass I shall be very different from what I have been.

Joseph. This book says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new," 2 Cor. v. 17. May the Lord witness this of you, Tom. May you indeed know what it is to be born again: and as a new-born babe, to desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 1 Pet. ii. 2. May you be enabled to rejoice in this treasure, as one who has found great spoil. May you learn to feel your own sinfulness, and find in Jesus Christ the Saviour you need; and may you obtain the forgiveness of all your sins, through the blood he shed on the cross. "Search the Scriptures," because they "are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Tim. iii. 15. May the Holy Spirit guide you into all truth, taking of the things that are Christ's, and revealing them unto you. May these be the men of your counsel, Psa. cxix. 24, (marginal reading.) May they be a light to your feet, and a lamp to your paths, till you are brought through the grace of Christ to everlasting rest in heaven.

Thomas. Thank you, good neighbour, for your kind wishes.

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